

whites were unemployed and it “hoped . . . that it will not end in empty declarations but in deeds.”¹⁰⁴ Leaders gave prompt attention to the police and fire departments. The rewarded white men who had been instrumental in assuring an election victory and the violence of November 10 with paid positions on these forces. Red Shirt leader Mike Dowling was a newly appointed firefighter but he was discharged for drunkenness shortly after hire in March 1899.¹⁰⁵ Other personnel issues also appeared when two policemen were

suspended for intoxication while on duty in February 1899.¹⁰⁶

Previously an all-volunteer operation with both white and black firehouses, the fire department had been reorganized in November 1897 and made an official, paid department of the city. As part of this changeover, the fire equipment and tools proudly acquired by donation and hard work were given to the city for the use of the fire departments.¹⁰⁷ The all-black Cape Fear Company under Valentine Howe, which boasted some of the best equipment in the state, was one of the first stations to see a complete change after Waddell and his board came into power. On November 15, 1898, all black firefighters were fired, and white men were hired in their place. This takeover of a source of pride within the black community proved as galling as other aspects of the coup since the men lost not only their valuable equipment, results of their labors on behalf of the greater community, but their income as paid firefighters, and a camaraderie that developed among the firefighters and the neighborhoods they served. At least one new firehouse, the Phoenix, was closed and not reopened after the coup. The end result was that firefighting capabilities in the black

¹⁰⁴ *Wilmington Messenger*, November 12, 1898.

¹⁰⁵ Dowling was also made president of the newly formed White Laborer’s Union when they met on November 24 with over 100 members in attendance. At the meeting, the Union adopted a constitution and by-laws and passed a resolution to counter attempts by Waddell’s administration to curb spending. The resolution took issue with the attempt to lower salaries for some city employees: “We . . . uncompromising laboring men, who worked and voted to place the Democrats in power . . . have been shocked and surprised” by the pay cuts. They further challenged the city leaders to maintain the wages paid by the previous Fusion administration. Following on the heels of this declaration, Waddell’s administration stopped attempts to lower municipal worker wages. This debate reached Raleigh, and later in November, a Raleigh paper observed that the city should keep its course in adhering to all of the pledges of the White Declaration of Independence: “[I]t remains to be seen whether the community will stand on the declarations it has made” regarding white workers. The paper concluded that, if the city wanted to be “progressive,” it should hire only whites since it considered black labor stagnant and without merit. On March 6, 1899, Dowling was suspended until the Mayor’s office could hold a formal inquiry in which Dowling could attend a meeting with the Board of Aldermen and plead his case. In response, Dowling sent a reply to the Board informing them that they could “go to Hell.” The Board of Aldermen then dismissed Dowling for “incompetency, drunkenness, and insubordination.” *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 24, 1898; Raleigh *Morning Post*, November 31, 1898; Minutes of the Board of Aldermen, State Archives, North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

¹⁰⁶ Another Red Shirt leader, Theodore Swann, was rewarded with a job in the Waddell administration. On February 6, 1899, C. L. Frost and J. D. Hargrave were discharged for being drunk while on police duty. Minutes of the Board of Aldermen, State Archives, North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh; *Contested Election Case*, 383.

¹⁰⁷ The Cape Fear Steam Fire Engine Company No. 3, the best-equipped crew in the city, met before the changeover to a paid department, and decided to give their engine, horses and other equipment to the city. The Phoenix Hose Reel Company in Brooklyn had just moved into a new fire house in 1894 and had purchased a new hose wagon in February 1898. After the riot, the Phoenix company was disbanded and the firehouse was torn down in 1900. Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle*, 191 - 198.